

James Nord, *Minnesota Daily*

Congresswoman Betty McCollum, D-Minn., met with public health officials to discuss opportunities to improve health care nationwide and the effects of the federal health care reform law.

Even Wednesday's icy downpour didn't keep Congresswoman Betty McCollum, D-Minn., from celebrating the federal health care reform bill's one year anniversary.

McCollum trudged into the University of Minnesota's Boynton Health Clinic way off schedule to tour the facility and consult experts on key aspects of the year-old law. She took suggestions from Carl Anderson, chief operating officer of Boynton, and a panel of other University officials.

"As a former teacher, how are we going to make this work logistically?" McCollum asked the room, and the University staff eventually arranged themselves around her.

The conversation centered on how the University delivers health care to students and staff, what effect federal health care reform has had on care for students and ways McCollum could help improve health in Minnesota.

"I believe she's looking for positive indicators of health care reform and the value for students," Anderson said after the meeting. "She's looking for ways to manage different issues around health care."

As the discussion about the University's health practices progressed, McCollum and the group highlighted key areas of health care reform for students: the ability to stay on parents' plans as dependents until age 26, the elimination of provisions allowing insurance companies to deny coverage for children under 19 with pre-existing conditions and the improved coverage for students that sometimes opt to enroll in low-cost, high-risk plans often known as "scam plans."

On the topic of "scam plans," McCollum simply said, "I have a college-age student, I know."

She applauded the University's health insurance mandate for students taking six credits or more, a trend that is "now playing out on the national level" under the new law. She also praised the University's diverse preventative care options and public health outreach efforts.

University staffers described the "Gopher Chauffeur" a van that transports students across campus on weekends. Although Dave Golden, director of Public Health and Communications, said he originally called the van a "drunk bus," it has helped a lot of students remain safe.

Another University policy places "health advocates" in residence halls and greek houses to help students who are under medical duress or need advice.

McCollum praised such efforts as beneficial when taking a holistic approach to health care.

"I think you've got a really great model here that teaches young adults to be healthy adults," she said.

Veterans and mental health issues were also a hot topic. Mental health services are the fastest growing sector of services offered by Boynton, Anderson said, and McCollum offered political advice on solving the issues.

McCollum said she has been visiting communities in her district for the past few days during a Congressional recess to "put [constituent's] words to action" in Washington.

Because Republicans now control the US House of Representatives and could try to de-fund or repeal health care reform, McCollum is likely looking for positive outcomes to tout, Anderson said.

Uninsured student rates have decreased by about a percentage point since the bill was enacted, he said, adding that health care reform is going to "significantly reduce the risk that students have in their education, that the state has in their education, that the University has in their education."

New provisions of the law will become effective on a staggered basis until it is fully enacted in 2014.